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Free World Attitudes Toward US Reconnaissance Satellite Programs

The idea of reconnaissance satellites as a peaceful military activity, and as distinguished from weapons-carrying vehicles, is intrinsically too sophisticated to arouse interest in the general public anywhere. None of the glamour and human interest of manned space flight attaches to such mysterious technological efforts. Under the circumstances it is scarcely surprising that public interest in reconnaissance satellites of any kind is negligible almost everywhere in the free world. As far as we can tell, this indifference is practically absolute in the less sophisticated areas of the world--Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. Even in Western Europe, Canada, and Japan meager and mostly routine press coverage gives little reason to surmise that the level of interest is much greater.

The existence of a US requirement for effective intelligence on the Sino-Soviet bloc is generally clear to the governments of the principal countries of the free world, as well as to official, military and some other groups in those countries. Available evidence indicates that these elements generally (with a few exceptions such as in Japan and Canada), support US efforts to develop effective reconnaissance satellite systems. Only in the United Kingdom have isolated newspaper or magazine articles (notably in Flight, March 15, 1962) critical of US satellite reconnaissance efforts been noted and these have produced no visible impact or discussion.

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More generally speaking, all free world countries have shown a deep interest in the space race between the United States and the USSR. In some cases US activities in connection with satellites (but not specifically reconnaissance satellites) have elicited local concern. In Japan, for example, there has been reluctance to cooperate with NASA on the establishment of US tracking facilities because of suspicion that reconnaissance activities might be or become involved. In Zanzibar and Nigeria some groups have argued that the presence of US tracking stations is inconsistent with a neutralist posture since the stations may involve US activities of a military nature.

These scattered evidences of concern suggest that a concerted Sino-Soviet bloc campaign attributing sinister and threatening military motives to US reconnaissance satellite programs might well elicit a favorable and sympathetic reaction not only from anti-US elements in many countries, but also from others concerned over any heightening of international tension.

US efforts to gain support for the concept of the right of space reconnaissance would probably counteract the Soviet campaign to some degree. It is unlikely that the US could at this time gain widespread active support for a positive affirmation of the right to conduct space reconnaissance. It is more likely that friendly governments and some neutral governments can be brought to support, or acquiesce in, US

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efforts to avoid having the issue raised in international forums, particularly if they can be convinced that Soviet efforts to press this issue are obstructing progress in the development of cooperation in "peaceful uses" of outer space. However, the effect of a major US effort to gain acceptance of the principle of legitimacy of space reconnaissance should perhaps be further studied. The form such efforts take might significantly affect their success.

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